

JUST A POSTAL.

By LESTER ROSE

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Jimmy propped the card against the sugar bowl, and while he hurriedly ate his breakfast his eyes seldom wandered from the picture. Della, the dining room girl, regarded him scornfully. What was the use of mooning over a picture postal with never a word to tell who it was from?

It was rather a pretty picture, a quiet little town nestling on the bank of a broad stream, but it might have been a love letter from the way Jimmy stared at it. Twice Della had to remind him that he must leave the house by three minutes past 8 in order to catch the last car that would land him at the office on time.

Della knew to a fraction of a second when each of Mrs. Beeman's twosome boarders must leave. Driggs jestingly called her the "human alarm clock." Recalled to earth by the second suggestion, Jimmy thrust the card into his breast pocket and sprinted down the street to the corner. Once on the car he took out the card again and had to walk back three blocks because he was carried past the office building still studying the picture.

After all, it was a picture well worth the study, for Arlington was one of the prettiest towns in his native state. Postal cards with local views were something new for the little town. Jimmy could remember the stir which the first illustrated postal received by an Arlingonian had made. Sarah Coyne, to whom it was addressed, had let the postmistress keep it for a whole week that all might see the curiosity. It had attracted more attention than the first Philippine stamp.

Now, it was evident that some amateur photographer had taken a picture of Arlington from the hill. Jimmy could almost locate the exact spot where he had often stood. It was over

stories and had called editorial attention to them.

It had all been a glorious dream, but Bessie's mother had died, and when they graduated from high school and he spoke of going to the city she had gently said that her duty was to care for her bereaved father.

He had used the argument that her great duty was toward herself, but she thrust the idea from her, and in the end he had flung away from her, declaring that she did not love him, else she would see that he had greater rights than her father, for whom she had worked all the best years of her life.

He had not written after that, not even to tell of his success. This was the first time he had seen her handwriting since he had left Arlington, and his eyes grew soft as he studied the chirography. Then his chief entered the office, and Jimmy had to bend to his work.

But thoughts of Arlington were strangely mixed with the details of accounts, and when the noon hour came he sought an interview with the head of his room. The latter was looking for an opening for a cousin and was glad enough to let Jimmy go without the usual two weeks' wait. Three days later Jimmy was in Arlington.

His first call was on the Brewsters, but the tiny maid told him that Miss Bessie had gone to town for a shopping tour and would not be back until evening. When the evening train rolled up to the little platform and Bessie descended from the car steps, her arms loaded with bundles, it was Jimmy who stepped forward to relieve her of her burden and who guided her through the little knot of station loungers.

"You are back for a visit?" asked Bessie when they had cleared the crowd. Jimmy shook his head.

"I came because of your postal," he explained. "It made me homesick, and I just had to come."

"I'm sorry," she began, but Jimmy stopped her.

"I'm not," he declared. "I'm glad I never was so glad about anything before. It was like a message that I had to answer."

"But now it may make you only dissatisfied to go back," cried the girl. "That's just the beauty of it all," explained Jimmy. "I'm not going back. I guess Arlington's a big enough place for me to stay in, especially."

"Especially?" she repeated as Jimmy paused.

"Look here," he said, speaking rapidly and with a voice that betrayed the intensity of his feelings. "I know I don't deserve to be permitted to speak to you after the way I acted about your staying here when I wanted you to marry me and go to town. I've forfeited all right even to see you, but if you could only know the time I've put in since I got that card you'd be sorry for me, even if I did act like a brute. You were right, Bess, in staying with your father. I was all wrong. But I am sorry. Do you think that perhaps some time we might be friends—good friends—once more?"

"We are friends now," said Bessie softly, "else you would not be walking with me."

"I don't mean that," objected Jimmy. "It's not just friendship I ask. It is something more. I want a chance to regain your love. Do you think that there would be a chance for me in time?"

Something in his tones told the girl of his sincerity and his loneliness. He had hurt her cruelly in those old days, but she had felt sure that he would come back to her. Her face grew softer as she laid a hand upon his arm.

"Why wait, Jim?" she asked. "You have learned your lesson." The bundles fell to the hard packed snow as Jimmy rapturously caught her in his arms. As he recovered the bundles once crushed under his grasp, and there was the tinkle of broken glass.

Bess gave a cry of dismay.

"You've broken the lamp I bought for the parlor," she reproached. Jimmy laughed happily. "I'll buy a dozen lamps for the parlor—our parlor," he promised recklessly.

Thackeray and the Scotch. A glimpse of Thackeray is given in "Memoirs of a London Club," by David Masson.

At all our meetings at the Garrick and at our club Thackeray always seemed to me, in spite of his light humor and his habitual nickname of "Thack" among his friends, to be a man apart, a sad and highly sensitive man, a man with whom nobody could take a liberty.

It was at one of the larger dinners of our club—it may have been a Shakespeare birthday dinner about the year 1890—that I chanced to sit next to Thackeray, and in the intervals of the speeches we had a good deal of quiet talk. But in our club gatherings there was often a lapse into what we called the "war of the nationalities," which consisted of good humored mutual chaff and banter between the English members and the two or three Scottish and Irish members of the club. It may have been this that somehow suggested the following bit of Thackeray's talk with me:

"D'ye know," he said, "that, though I can describe an Irishman perfectly, I never could describe a Scotchman?"

I reminded him of Mr. Binnie.

"Oh," he said, "that's not what I mean; that's a mere facsimile of a man I know, a mere description from life. But what I mean is, I couldn't invent a Scotchman. I should go wrong. But, oh, I'm quite at home with the Irish character!"

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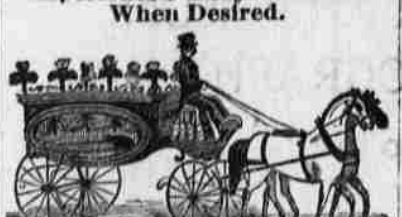
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